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ABSTRACT

The author describes her experiences as the faculty advisor for the newly created monthly student newspaper in her secondary school. Originally, student interest in the project was evaluated and care exercised to avoid too large a task group. Lead stories included editorial opinion concerning controversial issues in the school, club news, interviews with new teachers, reviews of television programs and movies, sports coverage, and so on. The role of faculty advisor as motivator and director of student output is stressed, and the total experience of writing and publishing the paper is viewed as an important exercise in written and spoken communication. (KS)

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A NEWSPAPER FOR THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

On June 20, 1975, I retired from teaching, quietly, with no fanfare and no regrets. During nineteen years, I have experienced a few incidents that have given me great pride and joy in my work ... all because of my students. My last year of teaching brought what I think is the greatest, or one of the greatest , achievements that my students and I have accomplished. Together, we developed and published a newspaper for the middle school.

When I started this project, I wanted to do something that would be representative of middle school needs and interests. For quite some time, I have had the feeling that the middle school student is comparable to a family's middle child in that they both face the same problem --- too old for childhood play, too young for real responsibilities --- which too often leaves them with nothing of their own. In reality, it is an age when boys and girls are quite grown-up in some ways, and not so grown-up in other ways. Therefore, the need for the newspaper developed ... something that would be their very own and would reflect their individual feelings.

To begin this middle school activity, the first step was to determine the amount of student interest. In my English classes, I explained that if there were enough interest we would have a newspaper of our very own. Those interested in becoming staff members gave me their names, and a time for the group to meet for initial organization was set. Fifteen students indicated interest in being involved in the publication of a newspaper. This number is enough; too large a group can cause problems.

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The first meeting, held during Friday fourth period study hall, was both a learning and a planning session. If your middle school program is anything like the one with which I am familiar, you will know how little free time students have ... Junior chorus and Junior band occupy the free time slot Monday through Thursday, leaving only Friday when all staff members could meet. Therefore, it is very important to have students working on the paper who are also in your English classes.

At our first meeting, the format of the newspaper was explained, questions concerning it were answered, and assignments for the first issue were made. The first issue of our paper, which was to be published monthly, was made up of an editorial, a lead story, school news, a contest to name the paper, a literary section, a sports review, and humor.

The paper was called MIDDLE SCHOOL NEWS for the first two issues; during this time a contest was in progress to find a name a little less ordinary. A ballot box was placed in the middle school office where the students deposited their suggestions. A committee from the staff reviewed the names suggested and selected three which they considered best. The results were published in the October issue and the complete student body voted on the three names during homeroom. The final result gave our paper the name, MIDDLE SCHOOL BUZZ; and the winner of the contest a bouquet of lollypops. The second place winner was EYE VIEW and one of our staff members thought it would be a good idea to use this as the headline for our new teacher interviews. We agreed.

Reporting assignments were made at the first meeting each month. We did not name people to specific jobs at the beginning, but rather gave a choice to each of the staff members ... all working as a team. Before the

year was half over, it was evident in which areas the students were best .... art, puzzles, interviews, editorials, creative writing. However, we never assigned specific titles (editor, assistant editor, art editor, sports editor, humor staff, reporters), but rather all worked together as a team realizing in which area they could contribute most effectively to produce the best possible school newspaper. One method we found that we liked was for reporters to work in pairs, especially when doing interviews.

Perhaps because of the fact that our paper was published monthly, the editorials took a clue for subject matter from what was happening at that particular time in our school year, or what happened in history during that month, or what special day occurred during that month, or in a few cases a combination of two of these. It wasn't long before we knew which student could best write opinion articles. Each month, that student was working on an editorial for the following month, and fellow students would ask, "What's it gong to be next month?" Often there were two or more ideas. The staff would run a poll among themselves to determine which idea they thought the best.

The lead stories followed a pattern of several categories: personal interviews with new teachers, articles on controversial topics such as the use of calculators in math classes (electronic cribsheets), mid-term exams, a pep talk from the guidance counselor, a series of articles written on middle school electives written by the teachers of the courses (music, French, Spanish, Home ec., shop,ag.). Here,it should be noted that when lead stories concern controversial topics in which there are definite opinions, both sides of the argument should be presented, not necessarily in the same issue but in succeeding issues.

The section of the paper devoted to the school news has the widest variety of material and, of course, depends on what is going on at the time, just before or just following the publication of the paper. There are basic items which nearly always appear such as Student Council News, FFA report, Yorker Club News, class trips, scouts, and special projects developed in regular classroom study. Here reporters should be cautioned to check the facts for accuracy both with student members and faculty advisors.

At the end of each marking period, the honor roll was published. Most students like to see their names in print.

In November, I introduced a new section in the form of a review of upcoming movies and TV shows which I wrote. What I was really doing was directing students in their viewing habits. Hopefully, on their own they would become more selective in choosing what to watch. As sources, I used TV GUIDE, READ, MEDIA AND METHODS, and SCOPE.

Creative writing from the regular English course of study can be used in the literary section. For quite some time, I have made it a practice to keep a folder containing copies of good student writing from class assignments, and I have found it very helpful. Students write for each issue, but there are times when additional material is needed. The issue following the science fiction convocation at Sullivan County Community College reflected in the literary section what students had seen and heard while in attendance at the college program.

Several months after the paper was first published, I often found articles, stories, poems, essays in my mail box. Some of these had a name on them; some did not. All were earmarked as being submitted for use in the

newspaper. In addition, I asked the other English teachers in the middle school to submit compositions from their classes for publication in the paper. Some did.

The presence of the male Shavianist was revealed in our sports review. Some of the seventh grade girls, true women-libers, pointed this out. There were intramurals in the middle school, but only for boys. The closest the girls came to involvement was in serving as assistant managers for the high school cross-country and track teams. An article, WHY NO GIRLS' SPORTS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL, appeared in the November issue, and in January plans were under way for a basketball team for seventh and eighth grade girls, thanks to the"power of the press".

The brand of humor enjoyed by middle school boys and girls is completely different from that appreciated by other ages. Puzzles and cartoons are favorites. Three types of puzzles that students like are the word search, scrambled words, and the maze. Staff members drew original puzzles. One that received a great amount of interest was composed of names of middle school teachers. Question and answer jokes contain the kind of humor enjoyed by middle school students, and cartoons without words, or with very few words are effective. One of our staff members, a fine cartoonist, drew the cartoon which appeared at the end of each issue.

The majority of the art work in the BUZZ was original; only a small amount was traced. Of the staff members, three were good artists. At planning meetings, the kinds of illustrations needed for the current issue were discussed. The staff artists drew a number of sketches to meet these requirements and the final selections from these drawings were made for use in the forthcoming [redacted] paper.

A column of lost and found articles was included at the suggestion of the office secretary. She appreciated the column as it helped to clear the shelves in the supply closet, and students found it to be a helpful service.

Up to this point, nothing has been said about the printing of the newspaper. If sufficient funds are available, the paper can be sent out to a commercial printer. However, I feel that the student involvement in the publication is more complete when the mechanics of publishing the paper are done in school using either dittoes or stencils. We used dittoes and as we needed over two hundred copies, it was necessary to type two dittoes of each page. We were fortunate that the teachers' aide for English courses was not only an excellent typist but also did very well in transferring our illustrations to the dittoes. Also, by not having the paper done by a commercial printer, we did not have to charge for the newspaper. On the last Friday of the month, the papers were distributed to each middle school classroom near the end of the last period, each student and teacher receiving a copy.

The behind-the -scenes motivation for a successful middle school newspaper is the responsibility of the faculty advisor who handles the steering wheel and is prepared to make final decisions when it becomes necessary.

For students, editing a newspaper is one of the best exercises in communications through both the spoken and the written word. It was my fortune to work with one of the greatest groups of young teen-agers; they never let me down. All fifteen finished the year "cum laude" in my book.

Too often, only the school athletes are recognized at the annual awards assembly. Make sure that this doesn't happen. Athletics are important, but so are other phases of education. All of our editorial staff were honored at the awards program. We also included a special thank-you in our final issue of the year to all who had helped to make our newspaper a success ... including both contributers and readers. We added that we were proud of our paper, and that we hoped the students of the middle school had enjoyed reading it as much as we had enjoyed putting it together.

One way to find satisfaction as a middle school teacher is to become involved in the publication of a newspaper. You will experience the joy of helping to create something which is very special to your students.

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